

MFA Creative Thesis; Welcome to the Ergosphere

A Supporting Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Art
University of Minnesota
By alex m. petersen

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts Degree
in Art
May 17th, 2017

Committee:
Lamar Peterson, Chair
Jenny Schmid
Jane Blocker

alex m. petersen

MFA Creative Thesis

05/17/2017

Contents

1. Space_Queers pt 1 - Intro to the Ergosphere

2. Queerness Radiating Through Space

3. Space_Queers pt 2 - Pining Over Hypersleep

4. Spread By the Breadth of a Molecule or Less

5. Space_Queers pt 3 - A Slippery Disclosure

6. Horizon \neq Apex; The Aesthetics of Prog Metal and Complex Narrative

7. MFA Thesis Exhibition Installation

All the Condoms I Didn't Use This Summer, paper mache, plastic, acrylic paint, condoms, 2016



Space_Queers pt 1 - Intro to the Ergosphere

This is a hallucination. A reflection, a refraction, an impression of self. It is my place of understanding, a world of my own in relational opposition to the general consensus of existence. I am a cultural cherry-picker, a living tumblr feed, a gnostic mystic anachronistically in-sync with spatial, temporal distortions of reality. I am a smooth and even parallel, keeping pace with what you already know. To your own understanding of truth this defines a substantiating placement of self; whatever it looks like at any moment. An associated syncretism devoid of allegiance to any current ideological structure, removed from beliefs, expectations, and the prison of senses. Although we share similarities in the form of ideas, structure, flesh and desire, I am but a fantasy, not yet fully realized but brimming w/ life, teeming w/ potential.

This is the amphetamine talking. Sporadic thoughts clinging, climbing, slipping, flowing useless. In beat, in-sync, thump, thump, thumping rhythmically. I stare into the darkness provided by night. Some things, some creatures, can see in this impenetrable obscurity.

Not I.

And in this knowing there is a comforting realization, the inability to discern the limitless void before me and what it offers of possibilities, prospective futures and an undeveloped past. Unrealized and unacknowledged it stretches infinitely, careening away from awareness, away from my own physical sloppy form, up and away, out into space.

"Now Approaching the Ergosphere," the ship chimes metallic.

"Thanks." I say. Or think, or think I say. It doesn't matter, the ship knows and replies, "Please prepare yourself."

"Now approaching the Ergosphere." An alarm beeps softly. It serves a gentle reminder of days past, those spent on a terrestrial surface, amongst people and structure. The uncanny feeling of awakening from a deep sleep while already awake washes over me. Peering into the darkness of space, a nebulous storm of dust and cosmic wind agitate a billowing cloud of tumultuous turmoil. A small ship steering into a hurricane, I as her captain, racing forward.

"Now approaching the Ergosphere." Similar to the heat of a fire, the ergosphere is the region directly surrounding a black hole. As an intermediary space it serves the role of boundary between unknowable chaos and the order of celestial mechanics. Continuously fluctuating, it shifts in scale and dilation, always in response to the crushing, collapsing mass of the black hole that it surrounds. This is the transitional expanse in which time and space begin to fluctuate. Rolling, shifting, inverting in on itself, the gravitational pull alters that which we understand of as time and place to become something else. What exactly we do not know.

"Now approaching the Ergosphere." I am the first human to arrive.

Queerness Radiating Through Space

Existing as graphite drawings and digital video, my current body of work fluctuates at the intersection of queerness and fantasy. In a shifting cadence of personal narrative and loosely connected material references, the content and subject matter pursue and

question the formulation of identity and the relationship of gender, sexuality, futurism, technology and the natural world. Above all else, it is about drawing. About the immediacy of thought, about the potential for imaginative capacity characteristic of mark making, about the enjoyment of graphite on paper as a medium and the communicative potential of images. Works on paper exist in two forms: large and small. Both modes of working reflect my daily routine and are influenced by a range of media including contemporary illustration, classical composition, high modernism, progressive metal music, 1970's science fiction cinema, theoretical physics and quantum mechanics, queer theory, classical literature, video games, and lastly, personal relationships to lovers and my dog. Deep breath.

Each mode of working has its own distinct style. Smaller works, a series entitled, *Manual_1*, harmonizes text and images, balancing subject matter with didactical, contextual signifiers informing a larger, complex narrative. Larger works consist of highly representational, technically proficient compositions. The format, scale, and presentation make effective use of raw materials such as wooden supports and simple painted borders. Edges of paper remain deckled and retain natural characteristics such as small rips, wrinkles, and curves. Smaller works are best viewed on a tablet or other hand held device. These can be viewed online at www.glitterhog.com

Utilizing narrative as an exploration of limitless potentialities in regards to sexuality and identity, graphite drawings seamlessly combine eroticized figuration, science fiction signifiers, and coloration culturally codified as "queer". In an attempt to transport the viewer to a place of ambiguously engaging associations, work is inspired by a blend of contemporary illustration and historical fine art approaches. By building a conceptual framework upon scientific and theoretical inquiry I hope to push the limits

of contemporary visual narrative, aesthetic sensibilities, and subcultural representation.



Horse Girl, graphite and gouache on paper, 22 in x 15 in, 2016

In his 2009 book, *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz introduces a platform by which to circulate a new understanding of queerness, time, and potentialities. By arguing for a space he refers to as horizontal temporality, movement to a greater openness of the world becomes a theoretical consideration for contemporary culture. Muñoz advances this argument through the notion of **queering time** and by outlining a clear distinction between **possibilities** and **potentialities**. Queer time, as an antithesis to linear time (or “straight-time”), draws on the reflective intentionality of temporality. His position

states that time is a mutable property and as such can be seen as a performative act. One in which the participant performs the role of time by remembering the past to venture into and evoke an unrealized future. As a medium, drawing elicits the passage of time in a similar way. It requires the self-reflective role of the artist to exist simultaneously before, during, and after labor. I understand this as a recognition of **potential**, or something that can theoretically exist, but *only* if you engage in the active role of creativity. It is by the immediacy of creation that intention is realized. From a past idea, to a present object and onward to a potential future, drawing exists outside of standard definitions of time. Drawing simultaneously grapples with materials and critical inquiry to produce tangible realities. New thoughts expanding narratives. This idea deviates from **possibility**, in which an unknown variable *may* happen whereas when pursuing **potentiality**, the unknown variable *can* happen. Of course, through the process of making, the result will always remain unknown, just out of reach, always unexpected, queerness as horizon. Drawing as double horizon.

Yet another aspect of Muñoz's theory that I find specifically enjoyable is the concept of ecstasy, borrowed from Heidegger. Muñoz references the feeling of euphoria as a tangible property. Remembering a euphoric past to project sensations, ideas, and potentialities towards a time not yet arrived, allows active engagement with an ever expansive vision of time. A vision that allows space for creative complexity, critical inquiry, and boundless self-expression; necessities needed in order to step away from the destructively dull and monotonously linear convictions that Western society generally confines itself to. A practical allegory could be illustrated in the 40 hour work week: the false promise to work until you can't and then vacation until you die. To think otherwise is paradoxical, fantastical, delusional. However, with the introduction of ecstasy the concept of time as a single track suddenly becomes marked with numerous bisections. This active engagement by the participant creates movement

away from “straight-time” into a more extensive, autonomous future. This is a future in which Muñoz considers ripe with **potentialities**, or that which *can* be imagined.



I Twerked My Ass Off For This (Recognition of Love), graphite and gouache on paper with acrylic and wood border, 55 in x 96 in, 2017

In *I Twerked My Ass Off For This (Recognition of Love)*, graphite and gouache on paper with acrylic and wood border, 2017 the viewer is confronted with a large vertical drawing depicting a well rendered self-portrait astride a large two-person horse costume. The

mount, by obscurity, has some level of anonymity. As a figure it could be composed of two people, although the upper portion (if considered objectively) defies this logic. As a costume it is derpy, dumb with a frumpy expression. A whip cream-like judiciary wig/mane balances delicately upon its head while the fabric of its body hangs in soft, silky folds. The rider, or self-portrait, is scantily clothed, wearing nothing more than a light pink pair of short-shorts. Both man and beast hold expressions of extreme elation, gazing up and away into untold distances. A small, yellow, exclamation point highlights the horses euphoria while the man's joy is expressed in large, cartoonish eyes. An almost depleted six pack of PBR tall boys adorns the mans belt, clipped in place of a six-shooter. His forward facing knee is rendered in extreme foreshortening. At the lower portion of the picture plane, surrounding the horses feet, remains the detritus of battles well fought: unopened condoms, smashed beer cans, empty vials of poppers and a spilled prescription of Truvada (accented in the characteristic and noticeably familiar blue). The picture plane is scarred by the rich history of mark making. Seen in erasure, indulgent values, and gestural lines composing the initial under-drawing, the drawing is more than a representational allegory, it is above all else, about the enjoyment of drawing. The top edge of the paper (cold press, fine art textured water color) is fixed to the wall by a rough cut pine plank. A painted square, teal border emphasizes the upper portion of the drawing. The bottom remains freely hanging, accentuating the natural, gentle, curve of roll paper. A shadow is cast along the bottom portion, just above the floor, balancing the painted border and pine wood fixture of the upper portion. The subject matter, of course, squeals in delight of queer fantasy.

In the opening chapter for *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argues for a queer *modus operandi* known as queerness as horizon. This concept, which has had an incredible impact on my work, sees the potentiality of queerness as a constant, flowing, ever evolving awareness. Queerness isn't a fixed destination, nor is it a concept that can be

exploitatively commodified to fit into the stagnant culture of Western Capitalism (the death of imaginative capacity?). Rather, it is an ideal always strived for, yet never reached. An identity constantly in flux, responding to the current contemporary moment, continuously becoming something new and, paradoxically, undefinable. A muscle bear in a bulldog harness, by now, has fixed meaning. RuPaul's drag race is an established form of entertainment. Ecstatic self-portraiture straddling a rearing two-person horse costume is unexpected, and because of this, has more autonomy. It shifts the understanding of queerness and gay male identity to a space not-yet-defined, while signifiers such as unopened condoms, used poppers, and spilled Truvada keep the imagery tethered to a contemporary reality. This avoidance of fixed understanding circles back to Muñoz's key concept of non-linear time and utopian thinking. Removed from the stifling death of social critique, this utopian way of being, as queerness, allows for a greater register of agency. It opens space for individuals or movements to project euphoric notions of a time passed into a future not yet arrived. For individuals to not only imagine, but creatively exist in multiple moments, creating worlds of their own design.

Welcome to Space_Queers.

Space_Queers pt 2 - Pining Over Hypersleep

Looking down at his soft, supple, sleeping body he looks dead. A sexy hunk forever frozen in the eternal bliss of non-sentience, feeling so good rejecting material reality,. Endlessly swimming through bumblebee dreams, sweeping planes of majestic majesty where the laws of physics need not apply; perhaps a torrential stream of nightmares. I wonder if he dreams of me? I can't stop thinking about him. I reach out a bony finger,

rest it on the glass, make a small scratching gesture. If there weren't glass in the way it'd be resting upon his cheek. I giggle. I wonder if he misses me? He's been unconscious for an awfully long time now, only a vague reflection of his waking self. A shadow form almost identical, yet devoid of sentience. This the sharply contrasting, yet subtle substance of sleep; the ability to traverse life and death in a singular moment. I giggle again. I can't even remember what he's like when he's awake. A total hunk, that's for sure. Aside from that...I watch for signs of life, for the shallow cadence of steady breath, for the stirring of activity long dormant. Skinny and concave in most places, atrophy plays a role when one experiences hypersleep. I can't recall how long it's been, I'm sure the ship knows...but I don't care, not by now, not anymore, I still find him hot. I've been waiting years for this moment and as far as I am concerned time is inconsequential. I miss him. I love him. It's almost time to wake him up. I wonder if he dreams of me?

I remove my clothes. They are cumbersome, unnecessary in this moment, and create an anxious tension with his nude form before me. I giggle a third time. This time in embarrassment. I always get so nervous. He is thin, gaunt, hair grown long. Even with slowed metabolism, proper nutrition and the freezing compound of preservative chemicals, his body devours that which it does not need. He looks like a dying AIDS victim of the 1980's. Although this references a past I did not experience, I relinquish a shudder. In its place I cannot help but feel love. An overwhelming sensation of neural chemical release floods my body, racing downward through spine, into chest, seeping through guts and other organs. Blood light with oxygen, a deluge of sexually stimulating warmth races through central nervous system, resting heart beat increases, the rapidity collecting in the basin of my pelvis. I look down at his dick, it's soft and dead looking. I like when he's having sexy thoughts, when he gets an erection. It makes

me wonder, I bet he's thinking of me. Holding me, missing me. All of his dreams are about me, I bet. We hardly knew each other before departure, such a young love.

He stirs. The wake-up chemicals are working. As the only technician left awake during the entirety of the deep space traverse, I upped his dosage so he'll wake up faster. No one will notice. I'm so impatient sometimes, I just want him awake. I want to ask him what he's been thinking about all the years, if he remembers me, if he's been dreaming about me. I bet he's been dreaming about me. Suddenly, I get hard. I am so aroused: mostly physically, but a little emotionally and cognitively too. Euphoria, adrenaline, feelings well versed with unpredictability release. I open the thick lid of his glass sarcophagus. Sliding away with ease I expect the sound of release, of a suction, of a hiss of air, of something, but there is nothing. The sleeping beauty casket opens into absolute silence.

The vacuum of space, a sound I know well.

My eyes slowly adjust. He's only illuminated by dim light for a split second before it flickers out. He moves a little bit, makes a small gasping noise. I gasp too! There's a tremble to my fingers now as I brush his skin softly, hesitantly. With a caring caress I roll him onto his side, away from me, opening room in the hypersleep chamber for two. The warmth of the cabin seeps into the small space as I slide in next to him. I think of myself as a long lost lover. I wonder if he dreams of me? I bet he does. Back to back we press into each other. It's more me than him, but we both feel the warmth, I just know it.

He turns! Rolling towards me, he is conscious, acknowledging the situation and responding accordingly! There is a palpable shift amongst the ship, the presence of

another living creature, indiscernible in its consequence. My action is a physical risk with implications of possible detriment, implications that my whole life of lived experience tells me is dangerous, wrong, somehow disgusting and perverse. I relish in the agony of a solipsistic life, one thus lived in fear, confusion, and terror for consequences of physical action. He rolls, turns, and an arm gently slips under my own, over ribs. I am the little spoon. Validated and radiating through space! I can hardly contain it! His breath, warm and musty, touches the nape of my neck. It smells like those worms you dissect in middle school. Whatever! This is it, he's awake and holding me! My breath catches and I dare not respond for fear of ruining the moment! But oh it's too much! I can't contain the inquiry, I bet he's been dreaming of me! The words catch in my breath as I must muster the courage to ask!

"Good morning sleepy head," I say. "Did you sleep well, have you been dreaming about me?"

There's a pause, and then he grunts, "Nope, just sports."

He farts, moves his arm to scratch his stomach, rolls away from me, starts snoring. My heart skips a beat. The spaceship is silent. It only takes a moment for reality to come back. A small cough clears my throat and I stand, softly shut the glass lid, and reset the sleep dial: 20,000 light years. A little saddened, I shuffle away. There's always next time I suppose.

Spread By the Breadth of a Molecule or Less

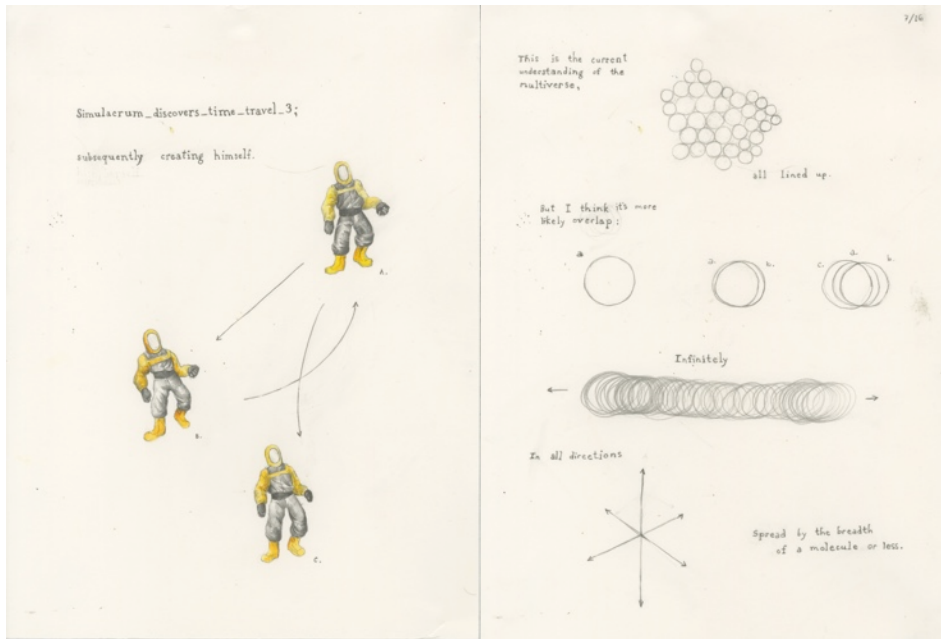
On a recent trip I decided to check out Grindr; an app that uses geolocation services to notify the proximity of its users. Although not necessarily confined by a singular motive, it is often used for hookups between male identifying individuals. Bored, and on a bus with wifi, I took advantage of this wonderfully advanced world we live in. I instantly came across a dude with whom I began chatting. Initially uninterested by the exchange, I harbored little gusto in pursuit. However, his enthusiasm was contagious and we continued messaging. Within the span of a few days, I was enamored. In addition to consistent sms exchanges, our correspondence blossomed to include frequent phone calls and nightly video sessions. He had me by the heart strings: an intensity matched to something I've rarely felt. We made plans to connect, but due to unforeseen circumstances, the rendezvous was continuously delayed. As time passed the likelihood that we'd meet began to dwindle. We were on opposite sides of the country, limited by time. Indulging panic, I considered the exceptional feelings of love and attraction I was projecting onto someone I hadn't met physically. Yet, I was experiencing a reality just as real, just as valid.

The era of digital communication has opened a parallel existence to the phenomenological world past generations recognized as fixed reality. In *Queer Sweet Home: Disorientation, Tyranny, and Silence in Digital Space*, Jules Wight claims that bodies always contribute to the queering of temporality in digital space. It is through the active participation and collective engagement by digital interface that provides the potential for temporal and spatial trajectories. I however would like to shift this line of thought away from digital interfaces, past the material world, to metaphysical reality, to that which we cannot see but perhaps, maybe, imagine through shared experience.

There is a validity in physicality, and although Grindr boy and I never met in the tangible world, there was a gravitas to our exchanges. A longing, an attraction, a pining so strong I felt it like a punch in the stomach. Aside from a physiological response, I believe this specific intensity of feeling (I retrospectively allude to it as euphoria) has the potential to convey a depth of meaning not yet recognized. At least I fantasize that it does. I began to speculate how this feeling exists in the world and if it can be replicated, or perhaps chronicled visually. If digital communication can open space for parallel realities, what's stopping the theoretical pursuit and development of other divergent ontologies?

In 1957 Hugh Everett first proposed the idea of parallel realities. His theory, known as the 'many-worlds' idea, postulates that quantum superposition can never exist as a solitary state. Rather, that which we perceive as a singular material reality actually exists as only one of many points in a vast wave function. This wave function, or quantum state of a system, implies that our observable reality is unique to ourselves, subjective to each individual. It is through the act of observation that we detach ourselves from multiverse potentialities; we can only experience one reality at a time. The greater implication of Everett's theory, is of course, that parallel realities are continuously divergent from that which we know, splitting and spreading infinitely.

The theoretical foundation of the many-worlds idea keenly coincides with my interest in science fiction and fantasy. Existing as a branch of speculative fiction, the genre of scifi offers an unlimited precedent for imagining that which is not yet tangible, that which does not and may not exist, but is imaginatively feasible.



Simulacrum Discovers Time Travel 3/Multiverse, graphite and gouache on paper, 9 in x 12 in, 2016

My recent work explores a limitless horizon of suspended narrative through science fiction signifiers and sexual identity. This decision is inspired in part by the work of Trenton Doyle Hancock and Charles Avery. Both artists working predominately in graphite with the sometimes subtle, sometimes not, addition of color. Hancock's work encompasses an overwhelmingly expansive narrative involving a fictional world inhabited by bizarre characters consistently at war with one another. In it's implication of aggression the narrative points towards violence, racism, xenophobia, and trauma amongst minority communities. Avery fixates his drawings in a reality more recognizable, yet still imaginary. Complete with artifacts, recurring locations, and references to a tangible world, his drawings could be based in actuality. The enormity and sustainability of these artists has been a major impetus for the development of the Space_Queers narrative. Although still in its infancy, my recent work evokes the bizarre associations of sexuality and outer space by developing a cast of fictional characters. Appearing in both video and works on paper, the ambiguous protagonists are reminiscent of early science-fiction cinema. Setting the stage for a mysterious

interstellar epic, smooth, cylindrical helmets complete with opaque, faintly glowing visors obscure the physicality of facial features. The limbs, torsos, hands and feet of characters are similarly covered by suits, gloves, and boots. Left largely to the viewer, interpretation of these figures include spacemen, cyborgs, aliens and/or astronauts. All signifiers pointing to cosmological circumstances.

In *Spread By the Breadth of a Molecule or Less*, (graphite, gouache and acrylic on paper, 2016) the viewer is confronted with a sizable composition composed of six spacemen characters. The format consists of a large 8 ft x 4 ft picture plane. Floating above a solid pink background, figures are rendered in graphite, adorned with color-coded costuming. Appearing life sized, viewers are placed in a direct relationship with the mysterious protagonists. In this configuration we must acknowledge them. With faces obscured from view, what is left but anonymity?



Spread By the Breadth of a Molecule or Less, graphite, gouache and acrylic on paper, 8 ft x 4 ft, 2016

The violet spaceman is Entropy; the other, clad in indigo is Coherence, the terminology of which is rooted in physics. Entropy appears on the right of the picture plane, facing left. Reflecting this position is Coherence, to the left, facing right. In quantum mechanics the convergence of entropy and coherence would result in the loss of information of a system, an instability of predictability, a fluctuation of spacetime, the ergosphere. This intentionality implies a movement of the characters towards the center of the picture plane, yet it is unclear if the figures represent six autonomous individuals or two marked with the trajectory of motion, possibly a division of space, or perhaps a visual marking of temporality. Three of the figures pass behind two others. Four overlap, creating a faint haze, or impression cast onto those they touch, existing in the same space, simultaneously. The central-most characters, those in direct contact with one another, engage in various states of arousal and undressing. Those on the edges seem more aloof, view askance, less aroused. There is an eroticism here, a sexual stimulation, somewhat aggressive and direct. But there is also a subtle intimacy noted in the gentle caress of clasped hands, of heads resting lightly on one another, of figures sharing space and a moment. Left largely to the viewer's interpretation, the charm of this drawing relies on ambivalence. It is unclear whether these are singular entities moving through time and space or if they're each a multiplicity of selves, fragmented by temporal/spatial distortions.

Similar to the tremendous profusion of love and attraction inspired by that boy from Grindr, my work aims, in part, to question the potentialities of physical reality. Much like the technological advances of a cellphone screen connecting myself to a distant infatuation, I hope my drawings serve an intermediary role. A bridge for viewers to experience an extrasolar fantasy, a placement giving rise to distant potentialities. Perhaps there is more to the physiological response of desire induced by spatial/temporal distance. Perhaps it is a clue, a hint to something more, something we are

acutely experiencing. Perhaps it is as incredible as the indication of a multiverse, of a parallel reality running smooth and steady to our own. A reality in which he and I, they and them, do not pine from a distance but from the span of a touch, a kiss, a caress. A reality touching our own, almost indiscernible, spread by the breadth of a molecule or less.

Space_Queers pt 3 - A Slippery Disclosure

His tongue slips deeper into my ass, probing, licking, slurping, eagerly after the cum he shot in there mere moments ago. His dick is still hard; slick and wet, throbbing in-sync to a pounding heartbeat. Droplets form on the tip of his erection and fall away in soft, thin, globules. Both hands slap my ass, pulling cheeks in separate directions. His moans reverberate up, into my body. I can feel them in my abdomen, rattling my prostate, legs quivering, over-stimulated. My own cum starts seeping out like oil through sand, like spittle on lips, like a laugh too big to contain. Moaning shifts to grunts and growls as he stands and shoves his big, thick, horse cock deeper and deeper into my swollen hole. 2,000 pounds of equine body on top pushing me down. I stagger to support the weight. Atlas as bttm bitch, Prometheus as fuck toy, I am his mare to breed. I thrust my ass higher in service, my head hangs lower, thanking myself for the quick yoga session I did earlier. He pushes deeper and I cannot contain it! I whinny, I neigh, I stamp and snort. Hooves stomping, heavy panting, huge horse cock throbbing

in steady cadence to each new thrust. I glance into a nearby reflection and glimpse my elegant, muscled horse body, my human torso, his curved spine and skin of soft fabric, derpy eyes and a mane that looks like wispy whip cream. The reflection is a tangled knot of human, horse, costume, desire. A fantastical orgy of unprecedented bliss. A two-person horse costume fucking a centaur. I snort some poppers.

Stars explode! I might pass out. Head rush. Sparkling motes of neural activity too intense to process flash and flicker, a flaming fire. Objects and matter materialize before me, obscuring my field of vision: hamburgers, freshly wrapped gas station breakfast sandwiches, disposable white coffee cups in brown cardboard sleeves with black plastic lids, dog shit bags in a myriad array of colors, corndogs; all flowing, floating, useless, surrounding us. An anti-gravitational dance of unadulterated trash freedom. This is advertising, effecting even my fantasies. An infinitely complex web of interconnected signifiers and disparate associations; all familiar, all me. Patterns, design, repetition. He and I, the two-person horse costume fucking a centaur is me, is mine, is all mine for now; a fantastically utopic materialist reality! I don't want to leave, I want to be here forever. If time is an illusion alluding to euclidean space that doesn't objectively exist, why wait? What's the point? It's time to get on with it. We are gods of our own reality, builders of Babels, wielders of technological innovations opening the complex equations of theoretical physics and multiplex mathematics. Back

on the planet Earth in the year 2017 this was only known as social media and virtual reality. LOL.

An informational message tunes in (this is a standard noncommittal occurrence. Luckily, algorithms only play it at the right time). It's a androgynous voice, assertive, yet kind,

"The prison of senses keeps us contained, tethering our subjective realities to a crude and limited understanding. A singular narrative, a lonesome life. An economy of desire dictates who we are and how we identify. To deviate is incomprehensible, a social suicide, an ontological crises as a response to yes/and rather than yes/no. You are who you are and you better not be more. But I say, whatever~ Join me in the new frontier, a augmented reality, a virtual reality, a frontier of unlimited potentialities. Relinquish the shackles of conviction and race into a new naively optimistic future. A progress trap of blitz and bling. A mediated pornography, forever stimulation. Quickly now, the Angry Birds and Candy Crush of the new utopia are close on our heels." [a babe in the latest fashion flashes a smile].

The ad stops playing and the interspecies, interstellar, sex fantasy resumes. By this point I'm more or less bored. I remove the headset returning to material reality. I

occupy a space-station, orbiting a distant black hole. I spend my days collecting data, watching sitcoms, engaging with others back on earth through digital interfaces. Sometimes I make toenail clipping toothpick log cabins, sometimes I dust. With each year, with each rotation, I slip closer to the crushing, collapsing mass of the black hole. I let out a heavy sigh and remember seconds ago when I was a centaur getting fucked by a two person horse costume.

“That was nice,” I think softly to myself.

Like a nuclear explosion, like a fusion reactor, I cum.

Horizon ≠ Apex; The Aesthetics of Prog Metal and Complex Narrative

It is summer and I am sweating profusely. I strip down to a pair of gym shorts in a futile attempt to mitigate the heat and humidity. Sitting on my couch I stare at a blank piece of paper, wrestling the twin specters of inspiration and motivation. I am trying to draw but nothing is happening. Scrolling through recommended music suggestions my heart skips a beat as my eyes catch a familiar title: Between the Buried and Me. They're a band I find endlessly fascinating, immensely inspirational; heart throbbing in joy, they've just released a new full length. With enthusiasm I throw on a pair of headphones and sink into the cognitively overwhelming reverie provided by progressive metal. The opening track begins with quite, clean, vocals. It is a slow introduction, outlining the conceptual basis for the entire album to follow: a solid

psychological thriller, a bat shit crazy scifi narrative, a compositional masterpiece spanning beginning to end. Within minutes the second track commences with a smash of drums, guitars, keys, and bass: a triumphant swell of positivity. Heavy instrumental arrangements hold back the thrash and distortions characteristic of metal, yet remain layered with swells of orchestration, insanely fast melodic coordination, and an incredible vocal capacity ranging from Freddie Mercury-esque falsettos to deep, throaty, growls.

A relatively new genre of music, progressive metal relies on classical musical theory and highly composed compositions. It is dense, it is cerebral. To claim these musicians are skilled is an understatement. Overwhelming excitement races through my body as the music reverberates internally. Exuberance crescendos and the album becomes almost too much to bear, too much to process. I race to my kitchen and crack open a PBR tallboy. Pouring it all over my face I record a snapchat and immediately send it to a bunch of metal head friends. Adding the text, “NEW BTBAM”, I scoop up a pencil and spend the rest of the day enthralled, consumed with wild abandon, exhaustively drafting a new drawing.

My reference to the genre of prog metal and the emphasis on this particular band is not a mere anecdotal remark about my passion for music, or even my trashy personal habits, but rather, I hope it serves an example of significant inspiration to my artistic practice. There is a direct correlation between the influence of technical proficiency within this specific creative genre and my approach to form and content. The unorthodox leap from audio to visual isn't so strange. In many ways, the excitement and intensity, not to mention richly composed musical compositions, provoke me to work larger and grander, developing a technical proficiency always slightly below what I know I am potentially capable of as an artist. In most works that I find inspiring,

whether it be the visual arts, music, or literature, I am responding to a labor of talent and a highly specialized skill set. This is not to say that technique is my leading motivation. It serves the role of active engagement, bridging conceptual inquiry with fantastical complexity. In addition, I'm fascinated by the narrative parallels between sprawling scifi themes characteristic of progressive metal concept albums and my own ambiguously complicated narratives.

Released on July 10th, 2015 the eighth studio album by progressive metal band, Between the Buried and Me consists of 11 tracks circulating a conceptual narrative. Firmly grounded in speculative fiction, the album, "The Coma Ecliptic" outlines the movement of a man traveling through past lives. By way of induced coma, the protagonist (who remains unnamed) gleans the ability to transcend the material world. Fixating himself in a shifting odyssey of alternate lives and parallel dimensions he finds himself in continuous pursuit of a better life. This trajectory outlines the conceptual crux of a man disillusioned with material existence and the ability to imagine something better, an "other" space, a temporal metaphor fixed in scientific investigation.

My recent body of work creates a similar space for theoretical inquiry. I am interested in expanded narratives that are both entertaining and conceptual relevant to a contemporary audience. I do not wish my work to distance itself from the viewer, to be unattainable. By quietly demanding attention, drawing bridges this gap. Contemporary Western culture is inundated with digital technologies; quick, fleeting, moments of attention. Screen time. Opposing this as a sort of technically arresting anachronism, drawings give the audience time, and space; permission to slow down. It's a different experience than consuming media from a screen.

Through intensity of detail, technique, and engaging narratives, my drawings insert personal commentary and social critique. The content of my current work consists of an ontological crisis depicted in self-portraiture and science fiction signifiers. The recognition of self-referentiality and the ultimate realization to project utopian ideals outward (onto paper) requires an internal perceptual shift. The work become relational to what the audience is seeing and understanding as an idyllic space fixed outside of linear temporalities. This isn't a world they're going to understand, yet challenged to do so, often enthralled by highly composed graphite renderings, the drawings open up space of inquiry and self-reflection.



LYLAC! (Love You Like a Centaur), graphite and gouache on paper, 120 in x 55 in, 2017

The complexity of this strategy requires more than a little effort at comprehension. Signifiers rendered, such as spacemen, self-portraiture as a centaur, two-person horse costume, and my dog Rosie are familiar enough to allow engagement, yet distinctly

odd, creating distance to any specific cultural reference. In *Love You Like a Centaur!* the viewer comes face to face with a violently explicit image of two spacemen tearing apart a centaur. Literally severing fantasy from reality, man from beast, me from horse, the narrative intentionally focuses on trauma and acts of violence. In this instance it is against gender expression and sexual orientation. This drawing began as a response to personal moments of physical and psychological aggression I've experienced as a gay man. My intention is to capture the intensity of trauma and communicate these experiences to others through a visual format. Existing in the realm of signifiers, images have the ability to transcend barriers of language. Drawing is universal, recognizable, and (relatively) immediate. Given the space for interpretation, every viewer will approach a drawing differently, bring their own experiences, and leave with something they hadn't experienced prior. However, the drawing itself will never change. Just the context of location, and time. Through complex narrative, I hope these experiences expand and grow, incorporating a multifaceted response amongst a continuously increasing audience. How to do this more effectively, while expanding narrative, is my focus for the moment. My intention is to open new spaces of dialogue, both for the conversations of queerness and contemporary art. Like Muñoz's theory of queerness as horizon, my creative impetus is continuously elusive, ever shifting, ever changing, growing in relation to the material world around me.

The social/political landscape of queer visibility is changing, and with it, the intention of the Space_Queers narrative. Where it is going, I am yet uncertain. For the moment the shifting, collapsing mass of material reality and theoretical inquiry is home, here in the ergosphere.

Bibliography

Esteban Muñoz, José. "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism." *Cruising Utopia The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York UP, 2009. 25-32. Print.

Stone, Lynden. "Re-Visioning Reality: Quantum Superposition in Visual Art." *Leonardo* 46.5 (2013): 449-54. Web.

Wight, J. "Queer Sweet Home: Disorientation, Tyranny, and Silence in Digital Space." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 14.2 (2013): 128-37. Web.

Between the Buried and Me. *The Coma Ecliptic*. Rec. 2015. Metal Blade Records, 2015. MP3.

Image List

1. *LYLAC! (Love You Like a Centaur)*, graphite, gouache on paper, 120 in x 55 in, 2017
2. MFA Thesis Exhibition Installation View_1
3. MFA Thesis Exhibition Installation View_2
4. *Good Night//Good Morning; Dreaming of Boys Club*, graphite and gouache on paper, 55 in x 72 in, 2017
5. *LYLAC! (detail)*
6. *I Twerked My Ass Off For This (Recognition of Love)*, graphite and gouache on paper with acrylic and wood border, 55 in x 96 in, 2017
7. *Good Night//Good Morning; Dreaming of Boys Club (detail)*
8. *Manual_1* (select drawings), graphite and gouache on paper, 15 in x 22 in, 2017
9. *It Doesn't Look Like Anything At All*, limited edition iOS iMovie digital video, 15 min, 2017 (film still #1)
10. *It Doesn't Look Like Anything At All*, limited edition iOS iMovie digital video, 15 min, 2017 (film still #2)
11. *It Doesn't Look Like Anything At All*, limited edition iOS iMovie digital video, 15 min, 2017 (film stills #3)
12. *Rosie, Do You Ever Think About Eternity?* graphite and gouache on paper, 15 in x 22 in, 2017

MFA Thesis Exhibition Installation

Katherine E. Nash Gallery, Regis Center for Art, Department of Art, University of Minnesota,
Minneapolis, MN, 2017





2.

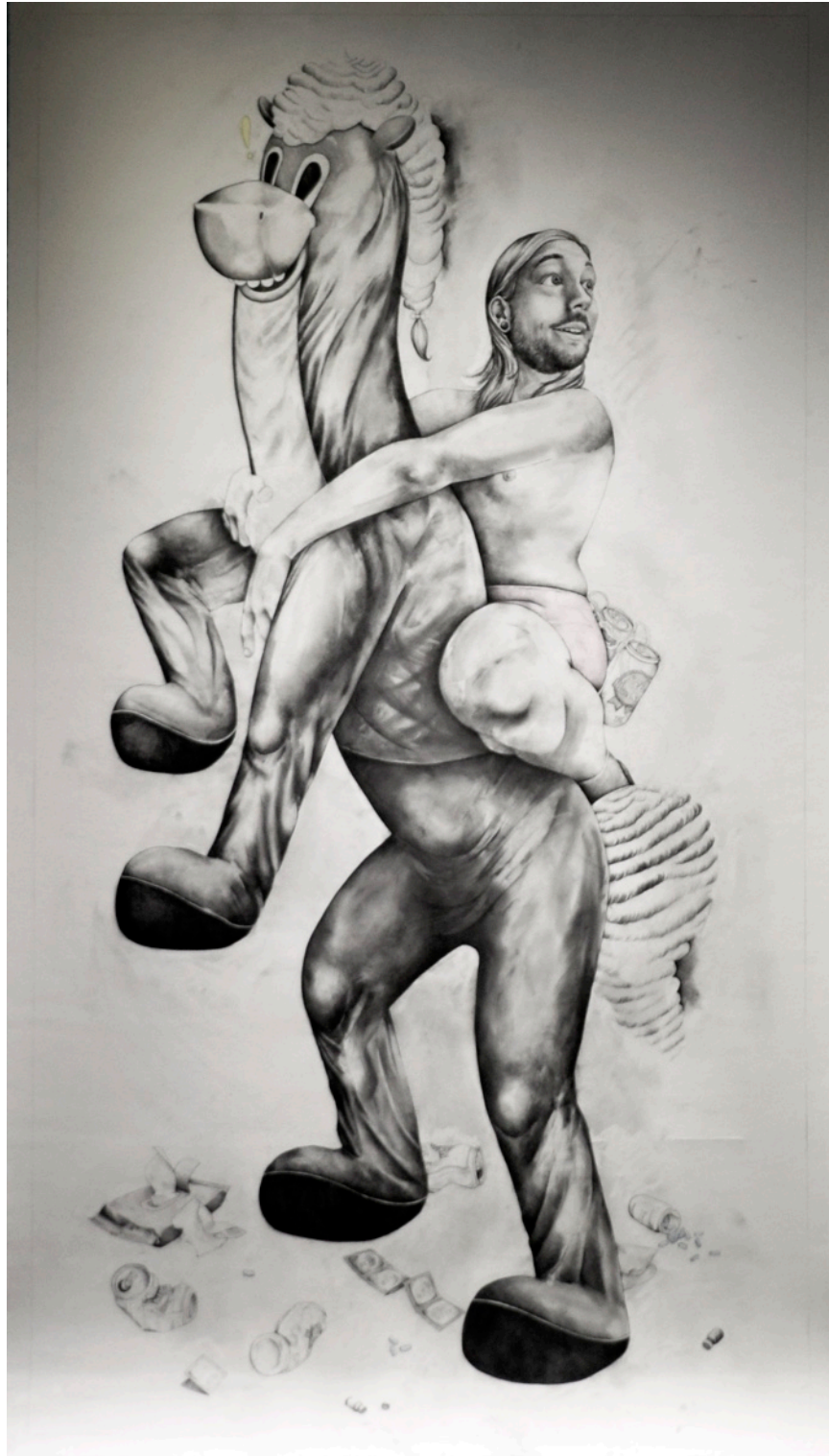


3.

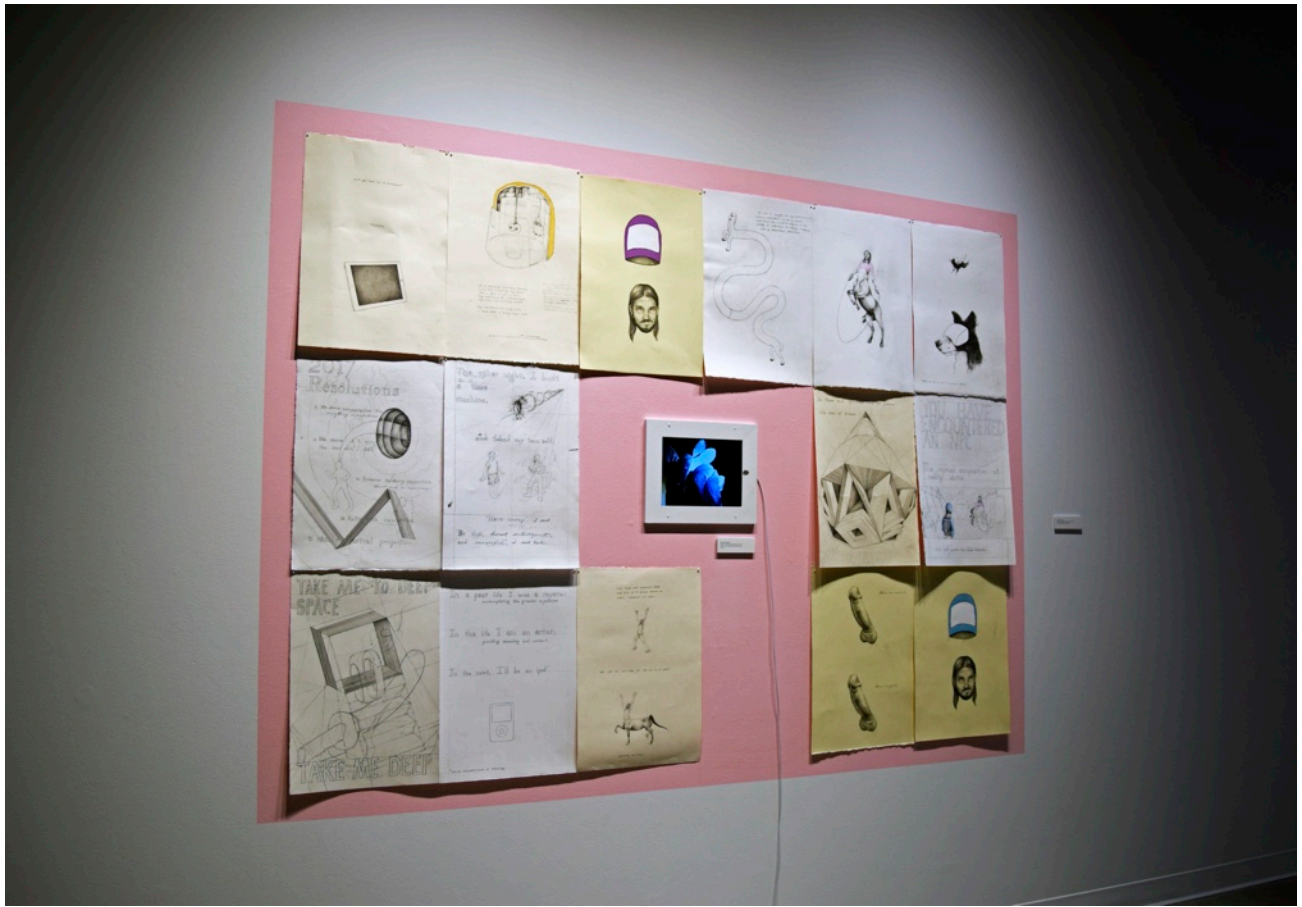




5.







8.



9.



10.



11.



C/V

alex m. petersen

1212 Powderhorn Terrace; Apt. 306
Minneapolis, MN. 55407
(563) 357-7804
pet00114@umn.edu
glitterhog.com

EDUCATION

- 2014-2017 **Master of Fine Arts - Drawing, Painting, Printmaking.** Department of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
- 2011 **Bachelor of Fine Arts - Drawing; minor in Art History.** Department of Art, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA
- 2010 **Studied** at Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland, through the office of International Studies, UNI
- 2009 **Studied** at the University of San Isidro Labrador, Grecia, Costa Rica, Independent Study

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2017 **Visiting Artist Colloquium Series,** MSUM (Minnesota State University Moorhead), Printmaking
- 2015-current **Graduate Instructor,** Introduction to Drawing, Department of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
- 2014-2015 **Installation Coordinator and Gallery Assistant,** Director Howard Oransky, Quarter Gallery/Katherine E. Nash Gallery, Department of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
- 2012-2014 **Head Teacher,** Art4Life, Portland, OR
- 2011 **Artist Assistant,** Rose Frantzen, Maquoketa, IA
- 2009 **Gallery Assistant,** UNI Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
- 2008-2009 **Lab Monitor,** Ceramics, Sculpture, Metal Studios, Department of Art, UNI

RESIDENCIES

- 2016 **Summer Research Opportunity,** Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, Dundee, Scotland

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- 2008-2013 **Illustration of Children's Book, "Tracks Count"** Craigmore Creations,
Portland, OR
Private Commissions for various clients, Portland, OR
Monthly Designs for "Affable Gentlemen" Storytelling Event, Portland,
OR
Designed Promotional Logo for "Go Iguana Travels" Katherine
Glasgow, Los Angeles, CA
Designed Album Artwork, Christopher Kent, Cedar Falls, IA

SCHOLARSHIPS/AWARDS

- 2011 **Jo Hern Curris Award for Performing Arts**, Competition Project Grant,
College of Humanities and Fine Arts, UNI
2009-2011 **Academic Scholarship**, Department of Art, UNI
2009-2011 **Dean's List**, College of Humanities and Fine Arts, UNI
2010 **Study Abroad Scholarship**, Office of International Studies, UNI
2007-2011 **Mabel Vacek Scholarship**, Oxford Junction, IA

EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 **Group Exhibition**, *MFA Thesis Exhibition*, Katherine E. Nash Gallery,
Department of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
Group Exhibition, *The Femme Show*, Why World, Minneapolis, MN
2016 **Group Exhibition**, *Masters Show*, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art
& Design, Dundee, Scotland
Group Exhibition, *Walpurgisnacht*, The Green House, Minneapolis, MN
Group Exhibition, *The Fun Show!*, Dep. of Art, University of Minnesota,
Minneapolis, MN
2015 **Group Exhibition**, *Graduate Showcase: Drawing/Painting/Print Making*,
Dep. of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
Mural Festival, *Forest For The Trees*, Portland, OR
Group Exhibition, *Valentine's/Anti-Valentine's*, Pony Club Gallery,
Portland, OR

2014 **Group Exhibition**, *Blinking Fresh*, Quarter Gallery, Dep. of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
Solo Exhibition, *Love Notes to Animals*, Fresh Pot Gallery, Portland, OR
Solo Exhibition, *Cosmological*, Fresh Pot Gallery, Portland, OR
Group Exhibition, *Cock Tease 2*, Cock Gallery, Portland, OR
Group Exhibition, *May The Force Be With You...Again!*, Good Gallery, Portland, OR

2013 **Group Exhibition**, *The Peacock Show*, Splendorporium, Portland, OR
Group Exhibition, *Set Apart*, Cock Gallery, Portland, OR

2012 **Group Exhibition**, *Witchipedia*, Pony Club Gallery, Portland, OR
Group Exhibition, *Tarot Show*, Splendorporium Gallery, Portland, OR
Group Exhibition, *Donation Show*, The Space Gallery, Cedar Falls, IA

2011 **Group Exhibition**, *BFA Show*, UNI Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
Group Exhibition, *First 50*, Hearst Center for the Arts, Cedar Falls, IA
Annual Department of Art Juried Student Exhibition, UNI Gallery, Department of Art, UNI

2010 **Solo Exhibition**, *Mythological Narrations & Fabricational Fables*, Dean's Triangle Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
Group Exhibition, *Vertigo A-Go-Go*, UNI Gallery, Department of Art, UNI

2009 **Solo Exhibition**, *Wheels of Galgallin*, Dean's Triangle Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
Group Exhibition, *Vertigo A-Go-Go*, UNI Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
Solo Exhibition, *I Am Neither Writer, Poet, nor Craftsman*, In-Use Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
Annual Department of Art Juried Student Exhibition, UNI Gallery, Department of Art, UNI
Solo Exhibition, *A Week at the Carnival*, In-Use Gallery, Department of Art, UNI